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REMINISCENCES OF CAPT. JESSE BURNAM.¹

I was born in Kentucky, Madison county, September 15th, 1792, being the youngest son of seven. My father died when I was quite young, and my mother moved to Tennessee in my sixteenth year, and settled in Red Fork County, near Shelbyville. We were very poor.

In my twentieth year, I married an orphan girl, named Temperance. I was still poor. I made rails for a jack-leg blacksmith, and had him to make me three knives and forks, and I put handles to them. My wife sold the stockings she was married in—made by her own hands—for a set of plates, and spun and wove cloth for sheets and tick for feathers. I traded for a small piece of land, and then we were ready for housekeeping. We used gourds for cups.

In my twenty-second year, I went into the war of 1812. John Hutcheson was my captain, and Col. John Coffee commanded the brigade. During this campaign I contracted a disease, and the physicians advised me to seek a warmer climate.

I started with nine families besides my own, and settled on Red River, at Pecan Point. From there I went to the interior of Texas, stopping for a few months where Independence now is. I had three horses, and brought what I could on them, my wife bringing her spinning wheel, and weaving apparatus.

We got out of bread before we stopped. Being too feeble to hunt, I employed an old man to keep me in meat. I had fixed up a camp, so that my family could be comfortable. My man failed to kill a deer, and we were out of food for two days. At last I heard one of my children say, "I am so hungry." I had been lying there hoping to hear the old man's gun. I was too feeble to hunt, but I got up and began to fix my gun slowly. I listened all the

¹This sketch is contributed by Mrs. Julia Lee Sinks, who obtained it from Captain Burnam's daughter, Miss Sada Burnam. Miss Burnam acted as her father's amanuensis after he became blind. Captain Burnam appears to have signed his name as it is given here, but it is more frequently spelled Burnham.—EDITOR QUARTERLY.

time for the old man's gun. I didn't feel as though I could walk, but I started on my first hunt. I had not gone far when I saw two deer, a fawn and its mother. I shot the fawn first, knowing the doe would not run far, then I shot and killed her. "Oh ho!" said I, "two deer in one day, and my first hunt!" I took the fawn to camp to my hungry children, and took William, my oldest boy, and a horse after the doe. My wife had dressed a skin and made William a shirt, but it lacked one sleeve, so she dressed the fawn skin that day and made the other sleeve.

It was while camped at Independence that I saw my first Indian. I went out to kill a deer and had killed one and was butchering it, when an Indian came up and wanted to take it from me. I would not let him have it, but got it on my back the best I could and started for camp. The Indian began to yell, I suppose for help, but I would have died rather than give the deer up. I thought if there was only one I would put my knife in him and save my gun for another. I walked along as fast as I could, he pulling at the deer and making signs that he wanted it on his back. I could not put it down to rest, so I walked into a gully and rested it on a bank, the Indian all the time making frightful threats and grimaces. Oh, but I was mad! When I got to camp it was full of Indians, and every one had been dividing meat with them. I told them I would not give them a piece to save my life, and that if that Indian came about me I'd kill him.

I stayed in that camp four or five months, and then moved down on the Colorado to what is now the John Holman plantation. It was the league that Austin had surveyed for me, my name being the thirteenth on the list of Austin's colony. All the colony had moved further down, so it was the highest upon the river of any of the settlements, and most exposed to Indians. All my neighbors moved down for protection, and at last I had to go, but did not stay long. I went back and built me a block house to fight from. It was at this place I had my trouble with the Indians in recovering the horses they tried to carry off.¹

We were still out of bread, and it had been nine months since we had seen any. A man from lower down the country came up and told me that he had corn that he had planted with a stick.

¹See the account, pp. 15-17.

There were no hoes nor plows in the Colony. I gave him a horse for twenty bushels and went sixty miles after it with two horses, and brought eight bushels back. I walked and led my horse. I had prepared a mortar before I left home to beat it in, and a sieve made of deer skin stretched over a hoop and with holes punched in it. I had always young men about me for protection, and they would generally beat the corn. Then we would have to be very saving, of course, and were allowed only one piece of bread around.

During the time I was without bread, a man stayed all night with us who had just come to the country. He had some crackers and gave the children some. My son took his out in the yard, made him a little wagon and used the crackers for wheels.

Our honey we kept in a deer skin, for we had no jars, jugs, nor cans. I would take the skin off a deer whole, except having to cut it around the neck and legs, and would tie the holes up very tight. Then I would hang it up by the fore legs, and we had quite a nice can, which we always kept pretty well filled.

About this time my oldest daughter's dresses were worn out before we could get any cotton to spin, and she wore a dress of dressed buckskin. I never wore a deer skin shirt, though there were many that did. I had pants and a hunting shirt made of deer skin. My wife colored the skin brown and fringed the hunting shirt, and it was considered the nicest suit in the Colony.

At one time while in the camp at Independence, I had but six loads of powder. A traveler stopped at my camp, and I asked him if he had any. He said he had. I had a Mexican dollar that Colonel Groce gave to one of the children for dried buffalo meat. He asked me if I would sell him some. I told him no, but he could take as much as he wanted. But, not wishing to accept in that way, he gave one of the children the dollar. I gave it to the traveler and told him to give me as much as he could, for I was nearly out and did not know where to get any. He asked for a teacup and filled it about two-thirds full. At one time I had twelve loads and killed eleven deer with them.

You ask me to tell you about taking the man's leg off.¹ I was living on the Colorado at that time. His name was Parker, and he lived on the opposite side of the river. His leg was terribly

¹This was doubtless the question of Mr. Burnam's daughter.

diseased, and he begged us to cut it off two months before we consented. One day he sent for me. I went over, and he took hold of my hand with both his and said, "Oh, have you come to take my leg off?" I said "Yes, I have come to do anything you want me to do." "That is right," he said. "If I die I don't want to take it with me." So Tom Williams, Kuykendall, Bostick, and I undertook the job with a dull saw and shoe knife, the only tools we had. I heated and bent a needle to take up the arteries with. I was to have the management of it and hold the flesh back, Tom Williams was to do the cutting of the flesh, Bostick to saw the bone, and Kuykendall to do the sewing. I took his suspenders off and bandaged the leg just above where we wanted to cut. I put a hair rope over the bandage, put a stick in it, and twisted it just as long as I could; then I was ready to begin operations. When Mr. Kuykendall began to sew it he trembled, so I took the needle and finished it. Parker rested easy for several days; but the third day he complained of his heel hurting on the other leg, and the eleventh day he died.¹

The first fight we had with the Indians was at Skull Creek. We were commanded by Bob Kuykendall, who had eighteen men in the fight. We killed fourteen Indians and wounded seven, who afterwards went and complained to the general government. We lost not a man. I killed one and wounded two.²

I served as lieutenant under Kuykendall, and after two or three months took his place as captain.

The next fight with the Indians I had was in the recovery of

¹I presume this to be the only surgical report on record for the early days. It is certainly very unique.—J. L. S.

²I subjoin a short account of the Skull Creek fight, given me by Col. John H. Moore.—J. L. S.

"A short time before the fight with the Carankawaes, three men came over the raft from Matagorda, having their boat there in waiting to carry their purchases up the river. Their names were Alley, Loy, and Clark. They were attacked not far from the mouth of Skull creek. Alley and Loy were killed, but Clark, having concealed himself in the cane brake, escaped. The evening previous to the fight a man by the name of Robert Brotherton had been wounded in the back by the Indians, which was the immediate cause of pursuit. A man by the name of Strickland and I went out as scouts to find their whereabouts. My ear first caught a sound that was rather unusual. 'Stop Strickland,' said I after listening, but he remarked

some horses at what is now known as the John Holman plantation, where I first settled on the Colorado. There were seven families living above, who were compelled to move further down into the settlements. They were stopping with me, and the horses belonged principally to them. The Indians had been concealed in the bottom waiting for an opportunity to steal horses. One morning at daylight, three Indians were seen driving horses by a man living with me. They were aiming for the head of the prairie on Williams's Creek. He ran in and gave the alarm, before I was out of bed. I had William, my oldest son, to saddle my horse, which I always kept secure, while I got ready. My horse was very fast, and he was the only one left. I mounted him, taking a pair of holster pistols and a rifle. The Indians were in sight when I started, and they were three-quarters of a mile from the house when I overtook them, in plain view of my family and those who were camped there at the

that it was only the thumping of wild turkeys. 'No,' said I, 'it is the beating of bamboo root for bread.' Still Strickland adhered to his first opinion; but when a child cried he believed me then.

"At once we returned to our company, which was commanded by Mr. Kuykendall and numbered about twenty-two men. We made our way to the bottom, got between the creek and the Indians, and surprised them, driving them out into the prairie. Twenty-three were left dead, without the loss of any of the whites. Clark heard the firing and afterwards, wounded as he was, made his way to our camp. [Yoakum and John Henry Brown both write the name Brotherton as given above; but the carefully ascertained list of the Old Three Hundred as given by Professor Bugbee, *QUARTERLY*, I, 110 ff., contains the name Robert Brotherington, who was no doubt the same person. The form given by Professor Bugbee must be correct, since it was copied from the signature of the man himself.—EDITOR *QUARTERLY*.]

"The Carankawaes were a tribe of large, sluggish Indians, who fed mostly on fish and alligators, and occasionally, by way of feast, on human flesh. They went always without moccasins, striding through briars unharmed, making such tracks as would hardly be attributable to a human being. Each man was required to have a bow the length of himself. The fight was an entire surprise. We all felt it was an act of justice and of self-preservation. We were too weak to furnish food for Carankawaes, and had to be let alone to get bread for ourselves. Ungainly and repugnant, their cannibalism being beyond question, they were obnoxious to the whites, whose patience resisted with difficulty their frequent attacks upon the scanty population of the colonies, and when it passed endurance they went to their chastisement with alacrity.

"This was the first fight with the Indians in Austin's colony."

time. I ran up within forty yards of them, dismounted, and attempted to fire on them; but they jumped about so that it was impossible to get a true shot at them, still driving the horses before them. I again mounted and pursued them.

By this time the Indians that had remained in the bottom joined them, making twelve in number. Seeing my only resort was to stampede the horses, I made a charge, yelling and shooting at the same time. The Indians stopped and prepared for me, thinking I would run through them, as the Mexicans always did. Attention being drawn from the horses, they turned towards home, as I expected. No sooner was this done than I charged in between them and the Indians. They fired one gun and a number of arrows, but none hit me. I succeeded in recapturing the horses, eight in number.

In 1824, I was informed by Captain White, an old trader who ran a small vessel, that there were Indians at the mouth of the Colorado river. He lived at La Bahia, and had started from there, and embarked at Port Lavaca in his little boat loaded with salt to trade for corn. He steered up the Colorado to what is called the Old Landing, two miles from the mouth. The Carankawaes were camped there, and they requested him to stop on his return with corn, as they wanted to trade with him. After landing he left a Mexican and a little boy in charge of his boat. He went up Peach Creek to the Kincheloe settlement in search of corn. There he told of the Indians' being at the mouth of the river. These Indians were hostile to the whites. The settlers sent a runner to me, sixty miles above. I received the news as I was on my way to the field to plow. Taking my harness off and putting my saddle on, I was ready in about a half hour. Having but two neighbors near me I left them, and went to Judge Cummings', fifteen miles below on my route. From this settlement I took half the men, which was seven, leaving the others to watch the Wacoes. I always left half the men at home for protection. I then went to the Kincheloe settlement, and took five from there, which made my number twelve, White in the meantime had exchanged his salt for corn, the corn to be delivered and the salt to be received at the boat. So we started on our march with a sack of corn apiece on our horses, having sixty miles to go. We camped after leaving Kincheloe's at Jennings's camp, where Captain Rawls joined me with twelve

men. He had gone to the assistance of Captain Jones on the Brazos. On his return to Kincheloe's settlement he heard that I had left there with only twelve men. He never unsaddled, but came on and overtook me at the place mentioned.

Next morning I started, expecting to go to where White had landed that night. Knowing I would be seen in the daylight, I waited in the postoaks until dark, then marched on, traveling twenty miles to reach the landing. We were very sleepy and tired, after traveling one hundred and twenty miles.

White was to inform the Indians of his return by making a camp-fire, a signal used by them. He gave the signal just at daylight. I left twelve of my men at the boat, for fear the Indians might come in a different direction, while I took the other half and went afoot down the river, to the Indians' landing place, about a hundred yards below where White had landed to wait for them.

About half an hour by sun the Indians came rowing up the river, very slowly and cautiously as though they expected some danger. The river banks were low, but with sufficient brush to conceal us.

Just as they were landing, I fired on them, which was intended as a signal for my men to fire. My signal shot killed one Indian, and in less than five minutes we had killed eight. The other two swam off with the canoe, which they kept between them and us; but finally one of them received a mortal wound from one of my men named Eray,¹ who took rest on my shoulder while I took hold of a bush to steady myself, and as one of the Indians raised his head to guide the canoe he received the shot. I returned home without the loss of a man.

White wanted to go down the river, so I sent some of my men with him for fear he would be molested by the remainder of the Indians. Three men went with him until they thought him out of danger, and then came back. He was taken after they left him, but through the entreaties of the Mexicans who were with him, he was turned loose.²

¹This name follows the copy in the handwriting of Mrs. Sinks. Perhaps it should be Gray. There was a Gray, but no "Eray" in the Old Three Hundred.—EDITOR QUARTERLY.

²See Yoakum's *History of Texas*, I, 225-6, for an account of this affair which gives it clearer justification.—EDITOR QUARTERLY.